

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSM-03 IO-13 CIAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2073
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSIN SINAI
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 19598

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: EG, IS, XF
SUBJ: INITIAL REACTION TO "CAIRO CONFERENCE"

SUMMARY: EGYPTIANS AND PRESS, RESPONDING TO REAWAKENING
EGYPTIAN NATIONALISM, HIGHLY POSITIVE ON SADAT CALL FOR CAIRO
CONF. "SYRIA AND PLO CAN DO WHAT THEY WANT." NON-EGYPTIANS
REACTIONS TEND TO BELIEF SADAT INITIATIVE WILL NOT BRING
PEACE, FOR ISRAELIS WILL NOT MAKE CONCESSIONS AND ARAB WORLD
WILL SPLINTER. MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT, AS LONG AS SADAT
HAS EGYPTIAN MILITARY AND PUBLIC SUPPORT AND SAUDI
BACKING, HE CAN DO WHATEVER HE WANTS. HIS ROOM FOR MANEUVER
IN PEACE PROCESS HAS BEEN WIDENED FOR REASONABLE PERIOD
BUT WILL NOT LAST INDEFINITELY WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT ISRAELI
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CONCESSIONS. END SUMMARY

1. PRESS ECSTATIC. EGYPTIAN PRESS REACTED WITH PREDICTABLE
ECSTASY NOV 27 TO SADAT CALL FOR CAIRO CONF. FOCUS WAS COMPLE-
TELY ON EGYPTIAN INTENTIONS AND PRESS DID NOT DEIGN
TO MENTION SYRIA, JORDAN OR IRAQ EXCEPT BY IMPLICATION.
EXTENSIVE COMMENTARY DEFENDED SADAT AS TRUE PILLAR OF ARAB/

PALESTINIAN CAUSE. ISRAEL MENTIONED ONLY AS ACCEPTING INVITATION TO CAIRO. US ROLE PLAYED DOWN, SOVIETS NOWHERE ON HORIZON. DOMESTIC SUPPORT HIGHLIGHTED.

2. VAST MAJORITY OF EGYPTIANS DELIGHTED WITH THEIR PRESIDENT. FROM BOTTOM UP, WE HEARING REPEATED EXPRESSIONS OF ADMIRATION FOR SADAT COURAGE, INTELLIGENCE AND DEEP NATIONALIST COMMITMENT. LABOR, WHICH HAD ALREADY CUT TIES WITH LIBYAN, SYRIAN AND IRAQI COUNTERPARTS BEFORE SADAT SPEECH, ASSURING US OF FAITH IN AND SUPPORT FOR SADAT. IT SEES CAIRO CONF AS LESS THAN BOMBSHELL IN COMPARISON WITH VISIT TO JERUSALEM. SYRIA AND PLO "CAN DO WHAT THEY WANT". SOME EGYPTIANS, NOTABLY AMONG THE BETTER OFF, BELIEVE SADAT IS FACT HEADING FOR SEPARATE PEACE, "BUT EGYPTIAN PEOPLE READY FOR IT."

3. NON-EGYPTIAN REACTIONS. ARAB LEAGUE OFFICIAL HORRIFIED BY SADAT MOVE. FORESAW SHATTERING OF LEAGUE AS ARABS SPLIT INTO CAMPTS WHILE ISRAEL PICKED UP PIECES. OPINED AGREEMENTS REACHED VIA SADAT METHOD WOULD NOT SOLVE ME CRISIS AND PROBLEMS WOULD FESTER INDEFINITELY. TUNISIAN DIP EXPRESSED ADMIRATION FOR SADAT BUT WAS DEEPLY PESSIMISTIC THAT INITIATIVE WOULD SUCCEED. IN FIRST PLACE, SADAT WOULD NOT BE ABLE COUNT ON VOCAL SUPPORT FROM ARAB MODERATES, INCLUDING TUNISIANS. "AS ALWAYS, THEY WILL SIT QUIETLY" WHILE RADICALS LEAD ARAB GROUP BY NOSE. IN SECOND PLACE, ISRAELIS HAVE THUS FAR GIVEN SADAT NOTHING, FACT HE WILL NOT BE ABLE

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CONCEAL FOR LONG.

4. EAST BLOC/SOVS GLUM. GDR DIP HAD DIFFICULTY CONCEALING HIS ANGER WITH SADAT AND ACCUSED US OF MANIPULATING HIM INTO PRESENT SITUATION. HE AND OTHER COMMUNIST COLLEAGUES PRESSED EMBOFF FOR ANALYSIS OF SADAT'S ACTION NOV 26 BUT WOULD NOT STATE OWN VIEWS. EXCEPTION WAS SOVIET WHO BELIEVED SADAT ATTEMPTING CREATE ALTERNATE SET OF PALESTINIAN INTERLOCUTORS AND WAS PROBABLY READY DUMP SYRIA AND PLO. SOVIET SAW CHANCES FOR OVERALL SETTLEMENT REDUCED BY SADAT INITIATIVE. PREDICTED OTHER ARAB PARTIES WOULD NOT GO ALONG. FELT SADAT GRATUITOUSLY SEVERE WITH SOVS IN HIS SPEECH. STATED HIS GOVT'S REACTION DIFFICULT TO GUAGE SO EARLY FROM SUCH A DISTANCE, BUT GAVE NO HINT THAT USSR REACTION WOULD BE BENIGN. IN ANY EVENT, ACCORDING SOURCE, SOVS WOULD NOT REACT PUBLICLY TO CAIRO CONF UNTIL OFFICIAL INVITATION RECEIVED. COULD NOT PREDICT IF SOVS WOULD ATTEND IN ABSENCE OF SYRIA OR PLO. RECENT TALKS OF RESTORED SOVIET-ISRAELI RELATIONS PREMATURE. "TIES WILL NOT BE REESTABLISHED UNTIL ISRAEL GIVES CLEAR EVIDENCE IT SINCERELY INTERESTED IN PEACE."

5. FRENCH EMB APPARENTLY HAS CONCLUDED THAT CAIRO CONF IS

PART OF SADAT MOVEMENT TOWARD SEPARATE PEACE. THEY ARE COUNSELING GOF TO DISTANCE ITSELF FROM PROCEEDINGS, WHICH LIKELY BE DISASTER, OR RISK OFFENDING PROFITABLE FRIENDS SUCH AS LIBYA, IRAQ AND ALGERIA. FORESEE RISE IN TENSIONS AND POSSIBILITY OF WAR WITHIN YEAR. THEY ALSO DISTURBED BY RAMIFICATIONS FOR DETENTE IF USG PARTICIPATES AT CAIRO AND SOVS DO NOT.

6. COMMENT: AS FAR AS CAIRO OPINION GOES, SADAT HAS INFURIATED OR FRIGHTENED EVERYBODY BUT EGYPTIAN PEOPLE, WHO ARE WITH HIM. REAWAKENING SENSE OF EGYPTIAN NATIONALISM IS PALPABLE (ONE PA'S MEMBER REMARKED AFTER SADAT SPEECH THAT SADAT HAS NOW EARNED SOME OF SAME AFFECTION EGYPTIAN PEOPLE HAD ACCORDED NASSER). EVEN SKEPTICAL OBSERVERS ADMIT THAT AS LONG

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AS SADAT HAS SUPPORT OF EGYPTIAN MILITARY AND PUBLIC AND SAUDIS, HE CAN DO WHATEVER HE WANTS. IMPLICATION OF THIS POPULAR SUPPORT IS THAT, FOR A REASONABLE PERIOD, SADAT'S ROOM FOR MANEUVER IN PEACE PROCESS HAS BEEN EXPANDED. HOWEVER, THERE IS GROWING APPREHENSION THAT SUPPORT COULD BEGIN TO ERODE IN NEAR FUTURE UNLESS ISRAEL RESPONDS WITH SIGNIFICANT CONCESSIONS.

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